

**Special
report back
issue**

MODDERFONTEIN
Conservation Society



Newsletter: August/September 2014

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WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE MODDERFONTEIN RESERVE

There was an element of sadness at the August evening meeting when Luke Strugnell delivered his annual update talk on developments in the Modderfontein Reserve.

Some 50 members and friends of the Modderfontein Conservation Society gathered at the Old Town Hall to hear Luke's talk and bid him farewell as he leaves the EWT for greener pastures.

While it seems like no time at all since Luke took on the management of the Reserve, it is actually closer to four years since his appointment.

Luke's divided his talk into several sections and presented some wonderful photographs taken by a photographer friend. The talk covered:

- Alien vegetation
- Tree planting
- Environmental education
- Fauna
- Birds
- Remote camera monitoring
- Recreational activities
- Fire management
- Erosion
- Safety & security
- Thanks



*BEE staff dig holes for tree planting programme.
Photo: Peter Olive*

Alien vegetation

Control of *Robinia pseudoacacia* (black locust) through judicious use of popping, herbicides and fire has been a success and large areas of the Reserve have been transformed from impenetrable forest into grassland. Luke did, however, warn that constant vigilance must be exercised to maintain this success. "New stands of black locust need to be eradicated as soon as they appear," he warns. He then appealed to all those who walk in the Reserve to pull out any seedlings that they observe.

Pom-pom weed has also been brought under control to a great extent. Only a few examples of this highly invasive plant were seen during the summer months. Again, Luke issued a warning. He has observed stands of pom-pom weed on AEL land adjoining the Reserve and appealed to AEL to institute control measures that will keep this threat at bay.

"We are making good progress," says Luke. "But there is still a long way to go. So far we have tackled six of the most invasive species in the Reserve but there are still between 20 and 30 more to go." These include poplar species, bugweed and kikuyu.

Tree planting

Many hundreds of trees have been planted at various strategic sites in the Reserve and Luke is optimistic that a watering programme will see a good number of these survive. Meanwhile, some 2 000 holes have been dug along the length of the new power lines into which will be planted a large variety of trees and shrubs that have been sourced from the EWT/Zendai Heartland nursery in Modderfontein and from outside sources. Some of the holes are large enough to accommodate trees

in 100 litre bags and many of them have provided a distinct challenge as the ground is very rocky in the area. This has also meant that extra care has had to be taken to properly prepare the holes to receive the plants. This operation is being undertaken by Highveld Works, under the supervision and guidance of Graham Millard, an MCS member.

Environmental education

The environmental education centre in the Old Explosives Magazine has received a set-back. A recent break-in resulted in the loss of a range of equipment including gas bottles and camping stoves. Also, the appointment of a full time education officer has been put on hold while Zendai Heartland and AECI sort out who will foot the bill for this facility. Luke is confident that this project will be revived but suspects that the candidate who he preferred for the position will not then be available.



Old Explosives Magazine overlooking Fish Eagle Dam with new water tank and waterless toilets.

Fauna

While Luke acknowledged that there was not much new to report, he did point out that there had not been any culling this year and that the animals are becoming somewhat more confiding. “Efforts to encourage the larger game to drink from the Modderfontein Spruit have been singularly unsuccessful,” he reports. “Despite placing salt licks to encourage the larger species to the river, they remain in their further-flung areas seeming to believe that the old fence between them and us still exists.”

Birds

Luke reported one exciting observation: “Leon Baben saw a Black eagle take and feed on a Guinea fowl near the Isidleke complex. He phoned me and asked me to join him urgently as otherwise he might not be believed when he returned to the office.” Asked about the Blue cranes, he reported that the pair had bred two chicks but that they probably had not survived.

Recreational activities

Walking trails: under the guidance of the MCS, six trails have been defined and partially marked with trail indicators. Also, Sally Hogan has master (mistress?) minded the programme to include “Points of Interest” indicators along the trails and these are now being installed by Luke’s intern, Rabelani Ravalume. Once the trails are fully marked, trail maps will be produced to enable visitors to undertake more meaningful self-guided walks.



Above: The MCS team preparing to distribute trail markers and, left, Peter Olive points out the start of the Jackal Trail.

Mountain bike trails: there are four in the reserve and these are closely monitored. Luke reported that his team had “deconstructed” a trail which had illegally appeared on the eastern shores of Fish Eagle Dam.



Bird hides: as these were found to be extremely hot in summer, shade cloth canopies are being installed to make them more comfortable and lightning conductors are being erected to ensure safety during Highveld thunder storms.

Fish Eagle Dam picnic site and braai area: this is proving to be extremely popular and some consideration is being given to enlarging the car park.



Restaurant and functions venue at Isidleke: Val Bonne has been licensed and seems to be gaining in popularity.

Park Run: the weekly, Saturday morning, Park Run is a huge success, attracting between 500 and 600 people every week. A large new parking area has been constructed at Isidleke, as well as enlarged toilet facilities.

The gardens in this area have been planted with indigenous trees and

shrubs and water points have been provided so that they can be easily watered without having to use a tanker.

Veld fires

Luke reported that he and his team had learned a lot about fire control over the past two or three years and that their programme of cutting and burning of fire breaks had proved successful. "Only one uncontrolled fire had affected the Reserve," he says. "This jumped our fire break due to a strong wind, but we managed to contain it to a relatively small area."



Firefighters at work. Photo: Robbie Vermont



On a cool, grey day in April power pylons made their appearance.

Erosion

"This is one of the most important areas in our management programme," says Luke. "We have been fortunate to get a large quantity of good topsoil which we have laid over areas in the Reserve that have been affected by erosion." These areas have been sewn with a mix of veld grass seeds and it is anticipated that they will rehabilitate well.

Safety and security

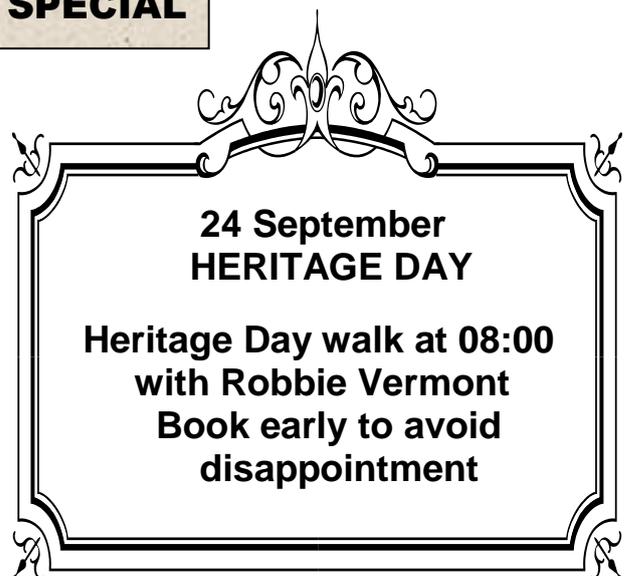
Apart from the break-in at the explosives magazine, Luke did not have any incidents worth reporting. He pointed out that the Reserve security guards had been issued new camouflage-design uniforms and this seems to have made a difference.

Thanks

Concluding his presentation, Luke took the opportunity to recognize the support and hard work put in to the Reserve by many. He thanked Zendai Heartland and AECI for the "serious funding", BEE staff for their hard work, Graham Millard, Team Supervisor Samkelo Mmcube, Urban Conservation Intern Rabelani Ravalume, the Modderfontein Conservation Society, the Honorary Rangers and iMvula Quality Protection Services.

MCS Chairman Ellen van Dongen presented Luke with a farewell cash gift from the Society, asking that it form the base for an education fund for his one-year old daughter Mackenzie.

HERITAGE DAY SPECIAL



Farewell John Clark

Almost 50 people turned up to say goodbye to popular Conservation Society committee member John Clark on Tuesday 19 August.



The event took the form of a bring and share picnic at Fish Eagle Dam in the Modderfontein Reserve. Chairman Ellen van Dongen and most committee members were present to wish John the very best for his impending move to Cape Town.

Robbie Vermont who has known John since he began walking with the Society back in 2001 said a few words in appreciation of the work John had done for the Society over the years.

“He and I hit it off right from the start,” Robbie remarked. “This was when development within the ‘Old Modderfontein’ village began and The Cottages complex was being built in Thornhill Estate. I was delighted to learn that John and his Pam would be our near neighbours in this complex, but that did not work out. I think the Clarks realised just how tiny the cottages were and decided to buy in The Vineyard development at Karaglen instead. My Pam and I shoe-horned ourselves into our cottage, but I have to admit we were pleased to move two years later into Thornhill Manor where the units are about 50 percent bigger.

“Not long after, John joined the committee and worked tirelessly until his allergies and Pam’s ill-health curtailed

many of his activities. I remember one of the projects which John undertook – the compilation of *A guide to the mammals of the Modderfontein Conservation Park*. This was a hefty task which stretched to almost 30 pages with the final draft being completed in May 2005. He received help from a number of the committee members in this venture, but due to the changes looming over the conservation area, sponsorship for the booklet was not forthcoming and the project was shelved. I think for John this was deeply disappointing as he had put his heart and all his energy into the project.

“During the intervening years, John remained on your committee and was a staunch supporter of the Society, leading walks, hacking trails, fighting invading aliens, clearing blockages at Otter and Crab Crossings, attending committee meetings, cuddling the ladies and spreading good cheer wherever he went.”

Robbie concluded by wishing John and Pam happiness and everything of the very best in their move to the Cape. He then asked Sally Hogan to present John with an album of photographs that she had compiled featuring his time with the Society as a token of love and appreciation from the many friends he had made in Modderfontein.



Joan England, Peter Grube, John Clark, Ken England and Flick Gruber at John’s farewell fling.
Photos: Robbie Vermont

Sean Byrne walks

Sean’s walks leave from Fish Eagle Dam in the Reserve and involve talking about and listening to Nature.

“If you’re feeling stressed, a walk with me in the beautiful surroundings in the Reserve will help to relieve the pressures bearing down on you,” he says.

Sean conducts his shamanic walks almost every Saturday or Sunday, depending on demand. Costs include the R30 conservation fee charged at the Reserve entrance and a R20 guiding fee, with the proceeds going to the MCS.

The outings embrace a number of topics including de-stressing meditative walks, post traumatic walks, energizing

MCS member Sean Byrne has a large range of interests and skills, including water divining and communing with nature. The latter he shares with people by taking them on shamanic walks in the Modderfontein Reserve.



Sean Byrne (right) consults with members of Thornhill Manor’s management team.

walks and life celebration walks.

“We try to get in touch with the animal spirits to help guide us and to give us clarity regarding our life paths,” Sean comments. “The Reserve is teeming with awesome bird life so bring along the good old hat and binoculars for an unforgettable experience.

“The walks range from one to ten kilometres, depending on ability and need and last anything from one hour to three hours.”

Interestingly, Sean is getting responses from Tai Chi groups that are keen to walk with him.

Reserve gates open and close at 06h00 – 18h00 and Sean can be contacted on cell number 072 207 2149. He asks people to RSVP on sean.byrne@imagnet.co.za by Friday of each week, latest so that he can get an idea of numbers.

Smarties for the winners

Janet Brodrick and Tricia Llewellyn picked the right team to host at the July Pam Vermont Memorial Quiz evening. Apart from Janet and Tricia, all were visitors – a bright bunch of young people who put their older, supposedly wiser competitors, to shame and ran out winners. Here they are showing off their prizes of packs of Smarties: (back row): Sandy Etchells, Rasnil Ahir, Tricia Llewellyn and Mario Compagnoni, (front): Janet Brodrick and Sharika Rutthan. Judging by the noise and laughter, they enjoyed the event.



YOUR COMMITTEE

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Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Modderfontein Conservation Society.

TELL US ABOUT IT

If you've changed your phone number or address please remember to tell Membership Secretary Robbie Vermont about it. We'd like to stay in touch but cannot unless we know where you are. Also, if your membership status changes, please let us know

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“CONSERVATION IN ACTION”

SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER PROGRAMME FOLLOWS

MODDERFONTEIN CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Programme of events: 2014

September	Friday 05	Night walk in the Reserve – Book with Carol on 011 443 4114
	Saturday 13	07:30 Walk in the Reserve
	Thursday 18	19:30 Heritage month – talk by Den Adams of Jo'burg Heritage
	Tuesday 24	08:00 & 10:30 Heritage Walks – Robbie on 082 800 3704
	Sunday 28	07:30 Walk in the Reserve
	Tuesdays: all	08:00 Walk in the Reserve
Contact Keith Martin (h) 011 608 2864 or 082 450 4003		
October	Saturday 11	07:30 Walk in the Reserve
	Thursday 16	19:30 Jonathan Leeming talk on Splendid Scorpions
	Sunday 26	08:00 Walk in the Reserve
	Tuesdays: all	08:30 Walk in the Reserve
	Contact: Patricia Llewellyn (h) 011 882 4114 (c) 082 497 9241	
November	Saturday 08	07:00 Walk in the Reserve
	Thursday 20	19:30 Peter Grube presentation on Wildebeest Migration
	Sunday 30	07:00 Walk in the Reserve
	Tuesdays: all	08:00 Walk in the Reserve
	Contact: Sally Hogan (h) 011 608 3089 (c) 082 291 8084	
December	Friday 05	16:00 End of year walk & braai. The walk will start at 16:00 and the braais lit at 18:00. Come when you can and bring your own food, drinks, cutlery, crockery and something to sit on. At the magazine boma.
	Tuesdays: all	08:00 Walk in the Reserve
	Contact: Any committee member	

SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE

Notes:

- **Saturday, Sunday and Tuesday walks** leave from Fish Eagle Dam in the Reserve promptly at the advertised times.
- **Bird Walks** are held on the first Saturday of every month.
For times and info: Pat Ayling on 082 465 3683 or Pat van Nierop on 083 326 6838.
- **Heritage Day walks – bookings essential.** Call Robbie or Keith. Cost R30.00 per person
- **FOR ALL WALKS: BE THERE AT LEAST 15 MINUTES BEFOREHAND**
- **Evening meetings** take place in the Modderfontein Town Hall at 1 Casino Road.
- **Charges:** Visitors pay R10 for walks and R30 for evening talks; members pay R10 for evening talks. Conservation fee to enter Reserve – R30/adult and R15/child or pensioner. Visit www.modderconserve.org

NIGHT WALK ON 5 SEPTEMBER

This walk will start at the Old Explosives Magazine where last year's Christmas walk and braai were held. Please RSVP to Carol (011 443 4114 or 082 906 5794) so she can make arrangements for the security guard at the factory's Ardeer Gate to admit you. The evening begins at 18:00. Bring everything you'll need, including chairs, for a picnic afterwards.